

City ski team makes waves of fun

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By Beth Kaplan
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"Ladies and Gentleman, it's show-time!"

So begins one of the hundreds of Capitol City Ski Team shows that have enticed audiences to the shore of Law Park on Lake Monona since the early '70s.

Families gathered along the lake's edge must stay alert to keep up with the split-second timing that moves the show rapidly along. Spectators could never imagine the frenzy which occurs just minutes before the show begins, as skiers adjust costumes, put on make-up, schedule acts and ready themselves for another performance.

Dressed in bright costumes ranging from traditional sailor suits to modified disco dancing outfits, the team skies backwards, barefoot, and in the air over a 6-foot high by 12-foot wide jump, complete with helmets for protection.

"Most clubs can do the same acts," said Chip Davenport, master of ceremonies and show manager for nine years. "It's how smoothly it comes off that makes the difference between those who are 18th in competition and those who are on top."

With the help of a top-notch boat driver, dock personnel quickly set out the needed equipment, and a team of strong, dedicated skiers, the group easily captures the attention of crowds that have sometimes numbered 2,000 a show, Davenport said.

Though the shows in the park are strictly for enjoyment, the team also competes against other state and regional ski teams.

The group has already competed this summer in an open tournament, hosted a state tournament this past weekend, and will take part in August in a national tournament — which it has won four times since it began in 1975.

But the city team is mainly a recreational one, "promoting the good healthy sport of waterskiing," locally



Jenny Simon strikes dramatic pose, held by Brad Moore.

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and nationally since 1966, Davenport said.

The skiers are involved in outdoor activity "not only to keep in shape, but to be outdoors," Davenport added. Another benefit the recreation brings is "being able to do things in a group, with close friends."

"The fun times are as important as skiing itself," he said.

Team members practice twice weekly and gather in small groups on other days to run through upcoming acts.

The group holds monthly meetings during the winter to resolve leftover summer business and to spend time with others on the team. Team members meet often to snow ski and play hockey during the off-season.

In addition to competing and show

skiing for Madison audiences, the team goes on road shows throughout the Midwest, which is "the most advanced area by far," in show skiing, Davenport said. "It (show skiing) is big in the Midwest because of the Tommy Bartlett show, which serves as a model."

Many former city skiers have left for the Bartlett show at Lake Delton, said Jim Pharo, the team's originator and occasional boat driver. "A lot of top clubs have our skiers," he said.

Members of the Bartlett show put on three performances six days weekly near Wisconsin Dells on Lake Delton.

Some of the team's skiers, who range in age from 16 to 28 and come from Madison and surrounding areas, have been there for as long as 10

years, practicing and perfecting their skiing skills.

"It's a lot of work and practice," said Renee Pedder, 20, a seven-year veteran of the team. "But it's a good group of people."

The 25 of 35 members who perform have "earned and learned their way" into the show, Davenport said, because new members generally do not ski in the show until after their first year on the team.

But those who don't perform play a very important role, he said. They are part of the dock personnel, who act together with the tug-boat driver (who pulls as many as nine skiers at a time), and the pick-up boat driver, (who picks up dropped skis and skiers), to keep the show running smoothly.

Skiers interested in being part of the team should come to one of the shows or practices to get more information. Practices are held in the park on Mondays and Tuesdays from 6 p.m. until dark. Showtime is 7 p.m. every Thursday and Sunday.